

Press Releases: Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo With Lars Larson of the Lars Larson Show

Interview
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Teleconference
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QUESTION: Welcome back to the Lars Larson Show. It's a pleasure to be with you. We'll get to your calls a bit later, but it is my great pleasure to welcome to the program the Secretary of State of the United States Mike Pompeo. Mr. Secretary, thank you for the time today.

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's great to be back on your show, Lars.

QUESTION: Well, and it's great to be – to have a man who's doing a fantastic job for a fantastic President. Let's start with some of the top-of-the-line issues right now. Let's start with Yemen. You want to see Yemen stop this civil war right now because it's putting us in a very tough spot with the Saudis. And then we can talk about the murder of Mr. Khashoggi as well.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, we need a peaceful resolution in Yemen. All parties – the Iranians, the Houthis, everyone needs to lay down their arms, begin a political resolution, and restore order and stop the civil war there in Yemen. It's in the people of Yemen's best interests, in the Middle East's best interests, and it's certainly in America and the world's best interests as well. And so we're hopeful that Martin Griffiths, who is leading the reconciliation effort, can get everyone to do that and then have a conversation about how to move forward in Yemen.

QUESTION: I mean, because we've got a war there that Saudi's involved in, and they want our help in it. There've been 17,000 people killed and eight million people are on the edge of starvation. But does this put us in a tough spot when we're also dealing with this side issue of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I mean, we've been working on this issue in Yemen for some time. Lars, don't forget – and I hope your listeners won't forget either – we still have a substantial threat from al-Qaida in Yemen. This is separate

from the civil war, but it is something that gets talked about less. You still have al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula operating from that space, and America, along with its partners in the Middle East, working to prevent those threats. They – largely threats to civil aviation that have emanated from that region from getting – from being successful against American interests.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, let's talk about Iran, still in the region. Where do we stand in this? I mean, I was glad to see the President pull out of the Iran deal. It was a bad deal for America and a bad deal for the world, but where do we stand with that country now?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It was a bad deal. The President pulled out of the JCPOA in May. I had opposed it when I was a member of Congress; I didn't think it made sense. So I think the President has the right end of the stick. I think we're moving in the right direction.

On Monday, in front of us, all of the sanctions that had been relieved by the Obama administration will return. And that's important, because Iran remains – after a couple years plus of the JCPOA, they still remain the world's largest state sponsor of terror. They continue to produce better and better missiles that can threaten the Middle East and eventually potentially Europe as well. These are not the kinds of behaviors of a normal nation. And so President Trump has made clear that the United States will apply pressure to the Iranian regime to change that behavior, to act like a normal country, and stop threatening the world. And when they do, we're happy to let them rejoin the community of nations.

QUESTION: All right. I'm talking to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. But if Europe is still doing business with them, but our sanctions land Monday – and I'm sure that because they knew the date they were going to land, they've already been to some extent anticipated – if Europe is still – and many European countries are still doing business with them, are the sanctions going to have as much effect on Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: I'm convinced these sanctions are going to have an enormous impact on the Iranian leadership. And most European countries – in spite of the UK, Germany, and France having determined that they want to stay inside the JCPOA, in spite of that, nearly every significant European company has already fled Iran. So while their governments say it's okay to do business there, they know. They know the President's words, which are that if you choose to do business with Iran, that is your choice, but if you do you won't do business with America as well. You have to choose between us. And the history, since May, now almost six months on, is that most European companies are choosing – not surprisingly – to do business with America. So I'm very confident these sanctions will have their intended effect.

QUESTION: No doubt. Mr. Secretary, what would the mullahs have to do to satisfy both you and President Trump that they've decided to rejoin the community of nations and not be this terror sponsor, and also the nuclear ambitions they still seem to have? What would they have to say or do?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Lars, we've laid out 12 items. And 12 may seem like a lot

to some, but frankly these are simple asks, asks like cease firing missile into the Middle East; stop arming Hizballah, which threatens Israel; cease engaging in terror activities in Europe. I don't know if you saw, just yesterday or the day before Denmark arrested an Iranian official who was plotting an assassination attempt in Europe. Stop those kinds of things.

And on the nuclear file, we've asked them to do what, frankly, was the United States official position until the previous administration caved, which is cease their nuclear activity. We're happy to provide them with the energy that they need, but cease their nuclear activity in a way that doesn't create proliferation risk throughout the world.

QUESTION: Do you have any doubt that they are still trying to pursue nuclear weapons at this point?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So what I can say is this: The Islamic Republic of Iran has refused to do the kinds of things which are the hallmark of countries that truly want to have a peaceful nuclear program and who don't have the intention or at least want to have the capacity to use their nuclear tools in a way that harms the world.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, let's move to North Korea. You did a lot of the preparatory work for President Trump. You were there on the frontlines. Where do we stand in that? I mean, it seemed as though we got some fairly substantial movement, more movement than I think anybody's seen in 25 years, despite all the accommodations that have been made for that country over the last 25 years. President Trump drew a hardline and he pushed back when North Korea pushed back, and I think North Korea got the message. But where do we stand there today?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We have made real progress on North Korea. There still remains an awful lot to do; I'll concede that. But no one thought this would either be easy, straightforward without some complexity, nor did anybody think this would be quick. Remember, we're only a few months past the June summit. This has been a problem that's gone on for decades.

We have convinced North Korea not to test fire their missiles. They haven't conducted a nuclear test. They returned a number of remains of American fallen soldiers. I'm hopeful there will be more to follow. And they have dismantled a couple of facilities, which we are hopeful we will get a chance to actually conduct verification on before too long as well. There still remains an awful lot of their nuclear program that needs to be dismantled and verified. We're working to bring those steps forward.

But make no mistake, President Trump's been clear. The economic sanctions will not be lifted until such time as we have had the capacity to verify that they have eliminated their nuclear program.

QUESTION: I mean, there have been times that the leader of North Korea, the dictator, has been very vocal, very belligerent, very much on the world stage. Lately, he seems to have been quiet. Am I misreading that he's being quiet because he is finally getting with the program, or is he being quiet

because he's got something else up his sleeve?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Goodness, it's all about verification. I was there a few weeks back. I met with Chairman Kim. He reiterated his commitment to denuclearize. We made a little progress on what the next steps ought to look like. I'm hopeful we'll have a summit before too long, where we'll make another substantial step along the way. Only time will tell.

What I want your listeners to know is, unlike previous administrations that have begun negotiations, grown weary of them, and then have provided North Korea with a whole bunch of money, this administration has no intention of allowing that to happen.

QUESTION: Let me ask you about one other issue, and that is Mexico. I understand that the President is taking the lead on that. I understand that in this – at this point, who knows. But does diplomacy play a role in negotiating with Mexico with regard to the caravan that's coming north toward the border? The President has said as recently as yesterday 10-15,000 troops down on our border to send the message: Don't try to come in illegally. Where does diplomacy play a role, if any, in this at this point?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It certainly does, Lars. We are not going to permit these caravans to come across our border. They will not be permitted to enter. Diplomacy comes in in multiple, as I talk to my counterpart there nearly every day about the progress that's being made and how it is that we can do the right things here in America so that Mexico can do the right things to ensure that these Hondurans, El Salvadorians, Guatemalans, and others don't transit their country and enter the United States. So we spend a lot of time. It's a foreign policy issue. It's a national security issue. The President's made that abundantly clear. And so there is a diplomatic element into urging these countries to do the right thing and prevent this unlawful entry into the United States.

QUESTION: And as a matter of international law, Mr. Secretary, now that they're in a country that has said – Mexico has said we'll give you safe haven here; we can – you can stay here; you can work here; you can make your home here. They're not truly refugees or asylees, are they?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It is the case the Mexican Government has been very generous in offering them an opportunity to stay and to work and to receive the benefits of having done that work. It certainly changes the legal context, in my judgment. But more importantly, I think it makes clear to these people who are traveling that heading to the United States is the wrong thing to do; it won't be successful. There are alternatives that will permit them and their families to have better lives. And so they should cease their movement towards the United States and either return to the country from which they came or follow the procedures that Mexico has put in place, which will permit many of them – indeed, nearly all of them – to stay in Mexico.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I have to tell you personally, as an American, it is a great pleasure to see a man who's on the same page as a great President, doing great work, and representing people, going to far-flung exotic places

like North Korea. God bless you for what you're doing, and thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Lars. Bless you, too. Have a great day.

QUESTION: Take care now. That's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

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